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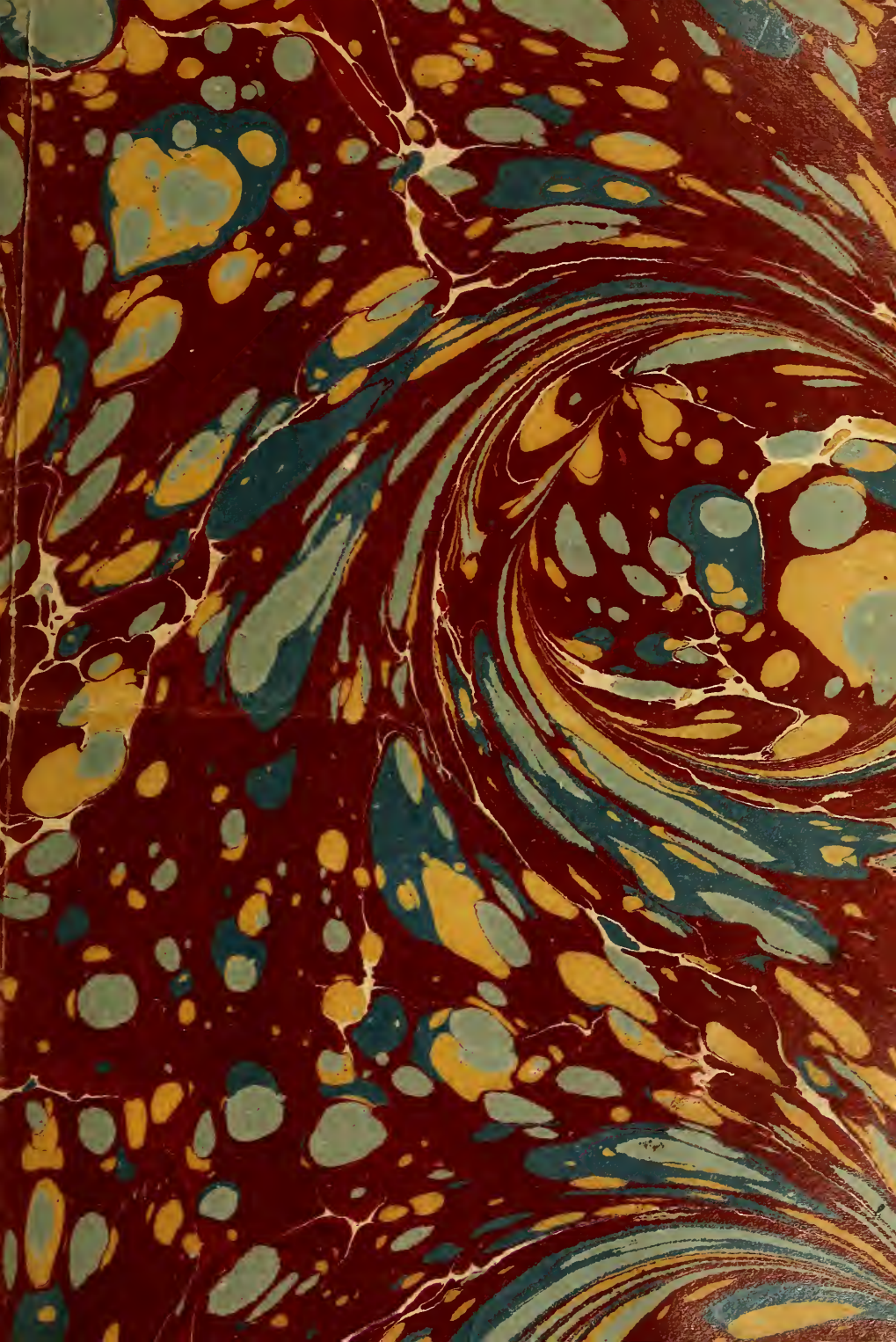
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# THEATRES & MUSIC HALLS:

## A LECTURE

GIVEN AT THE

COMMONWEALTH CLUB, BETHNAL GREEN

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1877

BY

THE REV. STEWART D. HEADLAM,

*Curate of St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green,*

WITH A LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON AND  
OTHER CORRESPONDENCE.

*Second Edition.*



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### NOTE TO SECOND EDITION.

*While the first Edition of this lecture was in print, I was dismissed from the Curacy in which I had worked for five years<sup>3</sup>; this fact is, I think, of some importance to the Junior Clergy; and will also, I hope, add emphasis to what I have said in the Lecture.*

S. D. H.

"The singers and the dancers, yea and all my fresh springs shall be in **THEE**." *Ps. lxxxvii. 7.*

"The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible."

"Furthermore it is necessary to Everlasting Salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord **JESUS CHRIST**."

*The Athanasian Creed.*

"Glad hearts without reproach or blot,  
Who do Thy work, and know it not :  
May joy be theirs while life shall last,  
And Thou, if they should falter, teach them to stand fast."

*WORDSWORTH'S Ode to Duty.*

"'Tis not from earthly paths I bid you flee,  
But lighter in My ways your feet will be :  
'Tis not to summon you from human mirth,  
But add a depth and sweetness not of earth."

*F. T. PALGRAVE.*

"Need I fear  
To mention by its name, as in degree  
Lowest of these and humblest in attempt,  
Yet richly graced with honours of her own,  
Half-rural Sadlers Wells ?

. . . . . Here more than once,  
Taking my seat, I saw (nor blush to add,  
With ample recompence) giants and dwarfs,  
Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins,  
Amid the uproar of the rabblement,  
Perform their feats.

Yet was the theatre my dear delight,  
  when romping girl  
Bounced, leapt and pawed the air.

The matter that detains us now may seem  
To many, neither dignified enough  
Nor arduous, yet will not be scorned by them  
Who, looking inward, have observed the ties  
That bind the perishable hours of life  
Each to the other, and the curious props  
By which the world of memory and thought  
Exists and is sustained."

WORDSWORTHE'S *Prelude*, Bk. VII.



## CORRESPONDENCE.

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

My Lord,

After having read an imperfect report of the following lecture, and after having received by word of mouth and in writing a statement from me in explanation of it, you have found it your duty to write to me as follows :

"My Dear Sir,

I have read your letter with great pain. Not for the first time it has caused me to ask pardon of our great Master if I erred, as I fear I did, in admitting you to the Ministry."

"It is, of course, vain to argue with one who prefers so unhesitatingly his own judgment backed by the approval of actors and proprietors of Music Halls to that of his Incumbent and his Bishop, neither of whom can well be considered Puritan : but I do pray earnestly that you may not have to meet before the Judgment Seat those whom your encouragement first led to places where they lost the blush of shame and took the first downward step towards vice and misery."

"My correspondents merely sent me copies of your lecture which, I am informed, was printed verbatim from the report in the *Era* to which your correspondents refer. I am, dear Sir,

Faithfully yours,

J. LONDON."

In other words your lordship fears that I am unfit to be a clergyman : I, on the other hand, after some experience amongst those who earn their living as Amusers feel that, knowing what I do, I should be unfit to be a clergyman if I did not at times speak as I have done in this lecture.

That I should, as a clergyman, consent to publish the lecture after having been addressed on the subject in such cruel and terrible words by your lordship, is sufficient proof that I am in earnest in the matter, and that it is for something more than the right to amuse myself that I am contending.

But the fact that after just seven years' hard work, day and night, in

the Diocese, your lordship should thus write to me, induces me, in publishing the lecture, to preface it with the following remarks.

1. I hold as an eternal truth that the Incarnation and Real Presence of Jesus Christ sanctifies all human things, not excluding human passion, mirth, and beauty, and in this firm conviction I am constantly strengthened by the fact that so many regular and devout communicants both here and elsewhere, enjoy heartily the drama, music, and dancing.

2. I hold that the clergy are bound as officers of the Christian Church, to consider well the question of Public Amusements : and while facing the fact that there are evils connected with theatres and music-halls, to use their influence to support what is good in them, and rid them of those who misuse them.

3. I hold that the religious world has done a grievous wrong, in refusing to recognize the calling of a Dancer or Public Amuser as a virtuous and honourable one. For this reason, I have spoken at length in my lecture of the goodness and public usefulness of such callings, and have not confined myself solely to the praise of tragedy, or Shakespeare.

4. That some coarse and low people frequent Music Halls I do not attempt to deny ; but one who has seen as much as I have of the conditions under which in our present social state, certain classes of the population are forced to live, knows better than to put down their want of culture or their evil living, to the account of the Music Hall Manager. I fight hard in my every day work against many of the evils which cause and are caused by these conditions—the outcome of our boasted modern civilization : in this paper, I fight against the evils by bringing out the good, of certain public amusements.

That my attempt should be met by your lordship in the way in which it has been, is proof of the deep rooted prejudice which the Clergy have to face, who contend for social reform ; but the fact that such prejudice is displayed in this matter, even by your lordship, proves to me more than anything else, that I am right in speaking out plainly.

I know how bitterly distressing and exasperating, your lordship's words will be to many who read them, and how they may still further alienate many from the Church into which they have been baptized : it is therefore most painful to me to have to publish them : but they

are so terrible in their condemnation that they leave me no choice but to appeal to the wider verdict of the Church at large.

I am, my Lord,

Your faithful servant,

STEWART D. HEADLAM.

135, Waterlow Buildings,

Bethnal Green Road.

• *Advent*, 1877.

\*.\* I take the liberty, which I hope the writers will pardon, of adding extracts from letters which I have received since my lecture was reported in the *Era*—the Editor of which I have to thank for a very full report, shewing what a few of those most interested in the matter think of my lecture.

The mother of an actress writes :

"I cannot express our great gratification at your article in the *Era*, I hope you will not weary of working in this field of Public Amusement, where so much needs to be said, and there are so few to speak. The Church has been such a cruel antagonist to the stage, that a kind word from one of her sons will be doubly welcome to the histrionic profession. The Green Room however, has its own little jokes at the expense of the clericals, and if given fair play would hold its own with the pulpit. In my poor opinion they are both human necessities and should be friends, not enemies in the cause of truth and beauty."

The manager of one of the largest Music Halls writes :

"Permit me to thank you very much for your courageous defence of Music Halls, too often misrepresented. That the performances are not perfect I am well aware, and that the comic singing is open to the charge of stupidity there is no denying—but really, the fault lies greatly with the public, who will rapturously applaud the merest doggrel; while receiving superior singing with indifference. If gentlemen would follow your example and visit the places they speak of or write of, it would materially assist us in gaining the reputation we so much desire—of giving a performance that no one need be ashamed to witness."

Another gentleman writes :

"Having read your admirable lecture in the *Era*, on Theatres and

Music Halls, I am of opinion that you deserve the thanks of the profession for your manly generous and straightforward views on these subjects."

The following letter is from a well known London Vicar, of long experience in the Diocese ; for obvious reasons I do not give his name : I commend his letter to the special attention of my clerical brethren.

My dear Headlam,

You ask me what I think of your lecture. I confess I have enjoyed reading it immensely. There are risks, of course, in being unconventional ; but I am perfectly clear that one of the chief minor needs of the time, is an unconventional spirit in our religion, if we are to commend it again to the classes who are before all things unconventional, and free from traditions in their religious notions, for the simple reason that—thanks to our scandalous neglect of them, and our miserable example—*they have got none at all!* I can quite understand, and feel for, the good folks who are hopelessly shocked at your line. But then I am bound to say that I know nothing much more desirable, than to shock out of their stolid complacency and slow-witted respectability, the whole class of old-fashioned, unobservant, unenterprising Church people,—lay and clerical—Bishops, Rural-Deans, Squires, Tradesmen, and the rest of them. Still, I think there is room for a little safeguarding of what you say. Perhaps when the whole lecture is printed, there may be sentences calculated to disarm your more reasonable critics. For example, I wish you would use the deserved influence you have, in some way before long,—if you did not actually use the present opportunity—to expose and denounce the sickening and demoralising *vulgarity*—rather than vice of many popular songs, if songs they can be called. I know not how reasonable people can expect us to make much *direct* impression of a spiritual sort, on the population which is capable of bawling "*Whoa Emma!*" about the streets, day and night for months, with inexhaustible delight in its monotonous and unredeemed imbecility. For myself, I own I always feel a certain scruple in taking the same people straight off the pavement and trying to make them sing

" For thee, O dear, dear country

" Mine eyes their vigils keep ;

" For very love beholding

" Thy happy name they weep :"



though they will do it, fast enough, poor people, if they can sing the tune! You and I, of course, know that we don't really need all the lectures we often get, on the duty of making the uneducated take an interest in the things of the Spirit, for their *own sake*. We do try now and then, and perhaps now and then succeed, thank God. But I confess that if I am to choose between hearing East-End louts and hoydens, making night hideous on their way home from Treats, in vans and excursion trains by bawling "*Whoa Emma*" or bawling "*Safe in the arms of Jesus*," then I must vote for "*Whoa Emma*," in the circumstances. It is a question of *indirect* attempts to Christianise by slowly civilising and refining their amusements. And this you cannot do without in some degree *sharing* their amusements and contributing *as much as they will let you, and can bear*, of a better sort. And they certainly won't let you do this, if you try to suppress all which is the natural expression of their own minds or even of their mindlessness. It is our unlucky knack of combining the pedant with the priest which has cost the church of England so much of her natural leadership of the people, and to recover it, it is clearly necessary to begin by trying to put oneself at the point of view of those whom we wish to lead into higher paths. And that I take it, is what you have done. You have tried, perhaps a little too sweepingly and rashly, to vindicate the pleasures of the people from some exaggerated or groundless imputation. And, though I doubt if you have admitted enough of the risk, nay, open certainty, of some lascivious suggestiveness, in a good deal of stage dancing, in your zeal for the "poetry of motion," still I am certain that you are on the right tack, and I heartily applaud your courage, being quite certain that "*Hon! Soit qui mal y-pense*," might be much more justly written over the stage of the East-End than of the West-End. Of course there are one or two touches in your lecture, which if it had been a speech in Convocation might have been better left out,—tho' I am not quite sure of it; or if your aim had been to be "safe" in what you said. But I take it your aim was exactly otherwise; and therefore I cannot be very sorry you said what you did. There is no doubt at all that we are, many of us, engaged in a stand up fight, not with individuals or even with authority as authority, but with the dominant class, and the

characteristic sentiment of the classes which have hitherto ruled the Church of England. And I see no good in disguising this from ourselves, or from them. We are desirous and ready to try, and perhaps able, to reconcile them to their "new masters," if they will let us. If they won't, if they still stand out for all the old privileges of wealth, position and culture, they will have to be *over-ridden*, in ecclesiastical, as in temporal politics, and the sooner they know that there is a whole School—of several generations of clergy coming up, who are perfectly prepared to *help* rather than *hinder* the people, in overriding them, if they won't give in and let the popular idea have way, the better. They will soon find out that the new school of Clergy are neither uncultured nor deficient in sympathy with the ideas and the better aims of the wealthy and refined ; but they are determined to *destroy*, one way or another, the air of *private property in the Church*, which these classes are apt to adopt , and to compel them to share their religious blessings with the poor and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And I read your lecture as an instalment of this great enterprise. You have gone out into the highways and hedges, and tried to compel the unlikeliest people to come within the circle of Christian influence, by telling them that Christian sympathy is not closed against them, even in their play. Those influences have one of their main centres in Cana of Galilee, though the chief of them radiates from the *Cross*. And just now the gospel of the first miracle which He wrought is the mode of Epiphany peculiarly needed. I need not urge you not to be dismayed at even very serious-sounding rebukes. We are not likely to forget of Whom the respectable once said "Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners." Nor are we without the comfort of feeling that the case was fully foreseen. "If they call the Master of the House Beelzebub, what shall they call them of His household."

I am, My dear Headlam,

Yours most truly,

\* \* \* \*

P. S. I have said nothing of the fact of your reading your paper at the Commonwealth Club on a Sunday night, which is no doubt an element in your offence, with some. For me, the question is simple.

Has the Church a message for all, or has she not? If she has, she must *seek* all. And she must seek them *where they are*, not talk at them where they are not. As matters stand, your audience at the Club would not have come to you at the Church. And Sunday is practically the evening to secure the largest number of them. Why you should not go to them, when your Sunday's special work is done, is more than I am able to understand





# A LECTURE

ON

## THEATRES AND MUSIC HALLS.

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It was quite as much for my own benefit as for yours that I proposed to lecture to you on this subject to-night. I wish in fact to start a discussion on the value of Theatres and Music Halls and to learn what are the opinions of the members of the Club and others about them : and I have done so to-night particularly because during this week, at the Church Congress to be held at Croydon, the subject of the Amusements of the People is to be considered, and I want to be able to tell a friend of mine who is appointed to speak what are the opinions of the People themselves on their own amusements.

I am afraid that many religious people would think me altogether wrong in speaking of Theatres and Music Halls except in terms of condemnation ; that more would think me wrong in bringing the consideration of them before you on a Sunday night. The remains of what was once a noble Puritanism still linger on in England. Many think Theatres altogether wrong, agreeing with a clergyman whom I heard say that the pit of the Theatre was the way to the pit of Hell ; others most inconsistently will go themselves, but would be shocked at hearing of a clergyman going ; others, without being shocked, are astonished. Indeed, I often hear behind me in the pit, or coming out, 'Why, he's a minister ;' or, 'Who'd have thought to have seen a clergyman here?' And in my first curacy in Drury-lane I knew two actresses, members of my congregation, for many months before they dared to let me know that

they were actresses, so natural did they think it for a clergyman to despise their profession. I want, therefore, to state at the outset what a deep respect I have for all those whose work it is to minister to our amusements, how disastrous it is to give such people a bad name. I regard the profession of an actor or singer, or dancer as an entirely honourable profession—it seems almost impertinent to say so, but while there are religious and other people who deny it, it is worth saying. It was only the other day in America that a minister refused to bury an actor, and that the members of the Dublin Skating Rink professed to be shocked at the presence of an actress. It is then worth while to assert the essential dignity of the Theatrical Profession, and not only that, but its extreme usefulness in our present state of society. Indeed, most of us work so hard, and live such worried, complicated lives, that we can ill afford to depreciate those who make it their duty to amuse us; and in our somewhat gloomy, ‘mud coloured,’ foggy London, we owe especial thanks to those who gave us bright, cheerful, beautiful entertainment in the Theatre or Music Hall. The great Christian poet, John Keble, speaking of the love of Beauty for which the Greeks were celebrated says that it was inspired by Christ.

“Oh Lord our Lord, and spoiler of our foes!

There is no light but Thine with Thee all beauty glows,”

and I should say the same of Theatres and Music Halls; it is the *whole* of human nature that is sacred and those who work for our amusement are I believe in their own way doing as sacred a work as any of us. But there is some part of the work in Theatres which is far too serious to be called amusement. When Mr. Irving read a paper about eighteen months ago to the clergy of this neighbourhood on “Amusement”—a most interesting paper, which was received with delight by the clergy, and which I heartily wish he would publish—I could not help thinking that it would not quite do to call it amusement going to see him in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*; rather it was intense study; real hard work, which one ought to go

to pretty fresh. From such dramas I should say that people do absolutely wrong to stay away ; it is not with them a question may I go to the Theatre ? but should I not do wrong to cut myself off from the tremendous moral lessons which the contemplation of them must teach ? I should say to a Christian, ' You believe God's spirit to be universal, boundless ; you have no right to cut yourself or others off from the messages which He sends men through such acting as Mr. Irving's.' "The play's the thing," says Hamlet, ' wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King,' and of the people too. I defy any one to see one of Shakespeare's great tragedies fairly well acted without having most tremendous moral lessons brought home to him. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, said that the object of tragedy was 'by means of pity and fear to purify those passions,' to make us more pitiful and more rightly pitiful ; to give us an intenser and more genuine awe for the mysteries of human thought, passion, action ; and Shakespeare, when he says that the object of the Drama is to hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own image, and scorn her own feature, teaches the same lesson. These things make it, I contend, a real duty for any who would not altogether neglect self culture to go to see really great dramas. But I do not propose to say anything more on this most serious aspect of Theatre going—there are, and there ought to be, other uses for the Theatre. It is as a place of amusement that I speak of it to-night. I wish, indeed, that there were more of Shakespeare's great plays well put on the stage and well acted. I think we should do all in our power to disprove the Manager's saying that Shakespeare spells 'ruin.' It would be very interesting to have some lectures on Shakespeare and so find out a little what we miss by not seeing his plays frequently.

But now I want to turn your attention to the *amusements*, and here I own that I feel it rather difficult to speak to a meeting of grave Englishmen on this subject. We are said, you know, to take our pleasures sadly, and some of our pleasures are sadly stupid and sadly coarse ; but not, I think, those

to be got at most Theatres. For instance, a piece which I believe had an immense run, *Blue Beard* as played by Lydia Thompson's company at the Folly Theatre, and the Easter before last at the Standard. I am sorry for the man or woman—for I notice, by the bye, that when people want to condemn a Theatre they always say you would not take your sister there, or you would not like to die there. Cardinal Borromeo's answer to a man who found him playing billiards and asked him what he would do if he was then called with a cue in his hand to judgment before the throne of God, was, 'Take the utmost pains to make the next stroke as good a one as possible'—I am, I say, sorry for the man or woman who, at the end of a day's or week's work, not without its own amount of worry or gloom, could see that piece without being refreshed and delighted. To hear 'You're a fraud' or to see the Heathen Chinees, and the bright singing and dancing of the whole company really did me good. Perhaps I am prejudiced, as one of the leading parts was taken by a young lady to whom I used to teach St. Mark's Gospel; but I call it first-rate of its sort. Or again, surely if the calling of an amuser is, as I maintain, really a sacred calling; if though all members in the body social have not the same office, yet still the body social cannot afford to despise any who do part of its work; then surely we owe a great debt of gratitude to such people as Miss Farren or Miss Kate Vaughan for their brightness and 'go' at the Gaiety, or to the Vokes, who have delighted us Christmas after Christmas at Drury-lane. John Bunyan, in those wonderful studies from life in the east of England in the seventeenth century which he has given us, speaks somewhere with regret of the 'young woman whose name was Dull;' and I suppose such young women are to be found in London in the nineteenth century as they were in Bedford or Elstow in the seventeenth. I really think if I were in authority over any such, instead of saying, as so many good parents say, 'I don't hold with your going to such places.' I should make it my duty to send every 'young woman whose name was Dull' to see these young women who are so



tull of life and mirth. My experience of two years in Drury-lane certainly leads me to say that Theatre-going—of course in proper moderation—has really a brightening, educating effect on those who go. And I often lament that there is such a plethora and congestion of Theatres in that neighbourhood, that they are not more spread, that we have not a Theatre in Bethnal-green, and that the few we have in this neighbourhood rather go in for heavy dramas and melodramas than for what is bright and pretty.

A few words on Dancing may serve to connect together the two halves of our subject—Theatres and Music Halls. And here I must confess with real shame that I have not mastered the art of dancing myself. My only excuse is really a very lame one, that I was brought up a Puritan and not allowed to dance in my youth, and that I have not had much time or opportunity to learn since my ordination. But I do seriously put it before you as an art which you should get all your children taught. I am sure it would do the children in the elementary schools more good than the military drill which they are now taught and against which I see some members of the Peace Society object. I don't altogether agree with them, but I would quite go with them if they asked to have dancing substituted for drill, the art of peace for that of war: to get people, men, women, children trained to move musically, harmoniously, orderly, what a joy would this give to life, how healthy too and beautiful. Mr. Ruskin, who is you know one of the greatest art critics, who probably knows more about the arts of drawing, painting and sculpture than any man in England, puts dancing above them all, as the highest of all arts; and certainly to see a beautiful dance on the stage—ballet as we call it is a most exhilarating sight. Of course we must acknowledge that in catering for a debased or ignorant public the designers of *some* dances have given us dances which are bad as all bad art is bad; and that a dancer who chooses to degrade her art to low purposes *can* do so. Let us acknowledge this and make it an incentive to ourselves

to study good dancing, to know it when we see it, and to support it in every possible way ; but don't let us, because some people of low minds, degraded by sensuality out of all sense of beauty, because such are to be found among the audiences of a Theatre and Music Hall, and because some designers of ballets perhaps cater for them ; don't let us be blind to the essential beauty of the ballet, or to the fact that the large majority of the dances to be seen in London Music Halls and Theatres are pure and beautiful ; above all, don't let us speak with scorn of the ladies who dance on the stage. As a rule, I am sure they do their work excellently, taking an immense amount of trouble about it, and it is no easy life I assure you, I only pray that I may always do my work so efficiently ; and in some instances of course, their work, as the work of all great artists, is really priceless. And pray bear in mind, ladies and gentlemen, what a lot of discipline a person has to go through in order to become a good dancer ; what a lot of good qualities are called out, educated, developed by the training which all good dancers have to go through. I assure you I have personally known instances of this in the case of children who used to dance in the Drury-lane and Covent-garden pantomimes, and who came to our schools in Drury-lane. I wish I knew enough about the art to analyse for you the ballet, to show you why you should be influenced by this or that. It seems to me, for instance, that such a ballet as *Yolande* at the Alhambra now, must appeal to all manner of good artistic faculties in any of you who may be wise enough to go and see it—the contrasting it and the dull, mud-coloured streets and clothes about us. I must especially refer you to one scene in Japan, where, to me at least, the arrangement of colour seemed delightful ; also to the way in which, in that and the dance that precedes *Yolande*, the dancers have learnt the art of moving their arms gracefully and harmoniously. Of course, with anyone who thinks that short skirts or trunk hose are indecent I can have no argument. I can only say I am sorry for them. If they think so they had certainly better keep away till they

have learnt better but if they are Christians I would quote them again Keble's lines

"Oh Lord our Lord, and spoiler of our foes  
There is no light but Thine, with thee all beauty glows."

I will now go on to the second part of my subject, Music Halls; and here let me say that I expect more opposition; *e.g.*, the *Echo* a few weeks ago had an article condemning (it seemed to me much too universally) Music Halls and the entertainments and company there. I wrote a short letter in defence, sending my card and signing myself a clergyman. Well, even that liberal little paper, which puts in all sorts of letters, would not insert the letter; the only notice, as far as I could see, which they took of it being to advise any who thought lower amusements necessary to go to the Christy Minstrels. Well, with all due respect for those excellent Minstrels, and with all due respect for the Editor of the *Echo*, I think there are entertainments at Music Halls which are well worth enjoying; and I would say to the Editor of the *Echo*, and gloomy religious people generally, that you do much more harm by a sweeping condemnation of a place than by a discriminating judgment. Recognise the good in any place or person, and then you have a right, and a power too, to go against the evil with some chance of success. Well, for some time after I had found out the good in Theatres I still thought Music Halls very low places—merely from popular opinion, for I had hardly ever been to one; but I am bound to say now that they seem to me, with one or two great faults, to meet a want which we don't find met by a Theatre. They are cheaper, they are more free and easy, you can go for a shorter time and yet see a complete entertainment for that short time, and they encourage a different kind of art. To give instances, the three Music Halls which have given me most pleasure are the Metropolitan, the Canterbury, and the South London. Well, at each of these you can go in for an hour when your work is done—and here let me say that it is only for people who work that any places of amusement are healthy; for the



leisure classes who consume without producing, and who go perhaps for low purposes, I have no word of approval : it is they who really give these places a bad name :—but after you have done your work you can turn in to one of these Halls, at say about ten o'clock, and be pretty sure of seeing really beautiful dancing and some fun. For instance, the ballet *Erin* at the Metropolitan, besides a lot of good dancing, includes some excellent songs and beautiful Irish scenery. If I remember right, two brothers of the name of Wilkinson pleased us immensely; or at the South London, at present, you might see three sisters, the Misses Elliott, whose dancing is beyond all praise, giving you really new thoughts as to the possibility of human grace ; and, at the same place, there are other dancers, (the D'Aubans, I think, who are wonderfully painstaking and agile,) and no end of grotesque fun, too. Once more at the Canterbury, I had the satisfaction of being there one night when the principal part in the dance was taken by Mdlle. Ada (she was as it were, the curate in charge ; her superior was away for a holiday,) and she, too, was excellent. Now, on each of those occasions, I had not more than an hour to spare, and yet I believe, if I could analyse my mind, I should find that I got a regular change of thought, true recreation of mind, in that short time. I say this is really an important matter ; people can work much better and much harder if they can get easily, from time to time, the recreation which they want. But such beautiful dancing is not to be seen at all Music Halls, you will say. I wish it was ; and so I come to the chief feature of the Music Hall, in the popular mind, I mean the solo singers. Now here, too, I think we shall do well to discriminate, for here, if anywhere, we certainly want reformation ; let me, then, say that I have heard good English ballads and other good well-established English favourites on the Music Hall stage often enough to make me wish to hear more. At the Cambridge, for instance, I remember hearing 'What are the Wild Waves saying?' and at the Oxford, 'Hearts of Oak ;' but I fancy that we get far better songs in this Hall, on our concert nights, than they give us at many Music Halls. I



don't now speak of coarse songs, songs with a half coarse chorus and one coarse verse—such have been sung, and are sometimes sung still: against such we should protest, gentlemen, with all our might; and they have nearly been got rid of; a little hissing, a few letters to Managers, a healthy public opinion, would get rid of them altogether. I am bound to say that as far as my experience goes they are very seldom sung now. But what shall we say of the endless *silly* popular songs? It is harder work to get rid of them. An educated people will do so; but Managers and singers, remember, are by these songs helping to hinder the education of the people. I believe that really good songs would be as popular as silly ones if Mr. Geo. Leybourne or Mr. Vance or Mr. Nash would but make a conscience of using their powers for the highest good in their art. 'Let me write the songs; I don't care who writes the sermons,' said some one; and there is no doubt that Mr. Macdermott or George Leybourne have far more influence in London than the Bishop of the diocese. I say we should do our best, not only to get rid of coarse songs, but of the unutterably silly ones. "Whoa Emma" and "Tommy make room," "And they all do it" and "The Same Old Game." Are these, ladies and gentlemen, worthy of being the popular songs of a great nation?—I maintain we are really degraded by them: of course it would be absurd to condemn very severely the boys and girls who pick them up and sing them in the streets, but I seriously suggest to you that these silly songs themselves and their singers are worthy of your strongest condemnation. I believe, as I have said, that the people would enjoy and take to really good songs instead—good old English ballads, &c. And not only so, don't mistake me, I am not condemning modern songs; we must have modern songs; and there are several now sung which are really good. I heard a capital spirited one about the Fire Brigade the other night; and songs called *topical* songs may be really very amusing; but still I fear I, as an upholder of Music Halls, must confess that the most popular songs are really for the most part not very creditable.

There is another kind of entertainment which is very

popular, but which does not please me very much. I mean the Negroists; but I know there is much in Negroism which takes the public taste. The *Spectator* had an article on the subject a few weeks ago pointing out the philosophical reasons for it all and shewing that it was partly connected with the old negro songs of freedom going so to the hearts of the people. I wrote by the bye, to the *Spectator* asking them to give us learned reasons for the pleasure given by other Music Hall entertainments and noting the fact that so respectable a paper went to Music Halls but they did not seem inclined to plead guilty to the impeachment and did not put in the letter.

Then there are also those entertainers which we may put under the title of gymnasts, including trapezists and acrobats, and performers of feats of strength. Now these seem to me to be most useful people, showing to what a wonderful pitch of obedience and discipline the human body can be brought. It may be that some of these do *unhealthy* things; if so, they are to be condemned; but the pluck, the nerve, the agility which we see in Zazel at the Aquarium are as admirable in my mind as her exquisite grace and beauty of form. And as for the Phoites, and Girards, and Wisés, they are *most* marvellous. There is another entertainment very popular at present, and which I think we should like to see very much extended—I mean the war songs, or, better, the national songs of different countries. I should like to have it discussed why as a rule the Music Hall goers are so very Turkish; but still they are not altogether so, and once at the Canterbury I heard the 'Marseillaise' encored four times, which was most satisfactory to my Radical heart. It seems to me that there is a great field open for the production of a lot of good political songs. We want them much, good stirring, social and political songs. That the Stage can hit social evils we see in the clever satires on West-end fashionables in Lydia Thompson's and Violet Cameron's songs in *Oxygen*; also in Miss Robson as 'Popular Opinion' at the Alhambra in *Orphee aux Enfers*; and sometimes in a clever hit in a topical song or Pantomine.

But we do want good national songs made thoroughly popular by being sung by good soloists and a good chorus on the Music Hall stage. And here I should like to ask why it is that there is hardly ever a chorus of singers for glees, &c., on the Music Hall stage. One of the best and most popular songs during the last seven years—one which makes one feel how good songs can be popular—was that very pretty 'Spring, Spring, gentle Spring,' &c., sung by a chorus of boys in that glorious spectacle *Babil and Bijou* at Covent-garden.

I have not said anything about what is to many the main evil of Music Halls, that in some cases they are much frequented by loose women. I don't think it all fair to blame a place for the people who go there. I also think that the large proportion of the Music Hall audiences are respectable working people and clerks; but that prostitutes do go there is undeniable. But I don't think *that* is any reason why respectable people should keep away—rather, perhaps, all the more reason why they should go; if some of the wives and sisters of the upper and middle classes would go, and not let their brothers and husbands say that Music Halls are no fit places for them, it would be indeed well; but I don't think we can or need blame the Music Halls in this matter—unless, indeed, it be true, as I have heard it stated of *one* Hall, that, to certain parts, prostitutes are given free passes. I don't know that this is true. At any rate it is by a healthy public opinion—by countenancing and enjoying all that is good in these places that we shall get rid of the evil. That there is very much that is good and delightful in them—I think I have shown to you.

*By the same Author.*

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